

Types of Polearms

Polearms are classified into four types: Halberd; Spontoons; Pikes; and bladed linstocks.

Halberd

The halberd was the combination of a battle-ax style blade with a central spear-point mounted above. Developed during the late fourteenth century, by the 1700's the halberd had become a symbol of rank for infantry sergeants. It was also popular in European culture for court and municipal officials who carried the halberd in civil ceremonies.

As the eighteenth century advanced, the halberd would be replaced by the officer's fusil and its attached bayonet. Nevertheless, the halberd would remain as a symbol of rank for non-commissioned officers of the line during the American Revolution.

Spontoon

Just as the halberd served the sergeant, the spontoon of the eighteenth century became a symbol of rank and close-order weapon for the commissioned officer. The spontoon typically consisted of a central spear-point blade with a decorative base or a crossbar, called a toggle. They were generally mounted on a wood pole, or staff, measuring 6-8 feet in length. Local hardwoods, such as ash, walnut, hickory, or oak would be used for the wood staff. The American army strongly favored the use of pontoons for commissioned officers during the American Revolution.

Pike

The third type of polearm during the 17th century was the pike. Often called a "trench spear," the pike was a supplemental interim weapon during the early stages of the American Revolution when muskets were in short supply. The heads were easily forged by local colonial blacksmiths and mounted on wood poles measuring 12-16 feet in length. Most infantry use of the pike, or trench spear, was contained to the first early years of the war. Equipped with iron points at the end, called butt cones, pikes could be thrust into the ground to help brace them at an angle against a charge of horsemen.

Linstock

The linstock was the artilleryman's polearm. Traditionally equipped with a central spear-point blade, the linstock included two projections for holding a slow burning "match" used to ignite a cannon charge. By the time of the American Revolution, many linstocks omitted the central blade and only mounted the two projections for holding the artillery slow burning "match" rope.

Glossary of Polearm Terminology

Beak: A hook component of a polearm's head opposite the blade. The beak was originally designed to hook the leather reins of a horseman's saddle to dismount the opponent in battle, or to pull down or destroy fascines, a type of field fortification.

Blade: A flaring iron or steel blade positioned at right angle to the polearm's wood staff. The blade frequently took a crescent shape or a battle-axe blade design.

Base Ring: Raised ring(s) which encircle the base of a polearm's head. They were usually decorative in use.

Lateral Arms: Iron symmetrical arms designed to hold the burning "match" rope on a linstock. They sometimes had animal figures or another decorative design.

"Match" Rope: Slow-burning section of hemp rope that was designed to ignite the main powder charge of a cannon. It was held within the lateral arms of a linstock.

Mounting Straps: Side elongated iron straps used to secure polearm head to the wood pole. Iron rivets, tacks or screws were typically used to secure the head to the pole. The longer mounting straps were also designed to protect the wood pole from being split or broken from an opponent's thrust with a sword or another polearm.

Spear Point: Central vertical blade. The spear point was often a leaf design, or diamond-shaped in profile. They usually included a raised ridge at the center, called a median ridge.

Staff: (Haft) Wood pole used to secure head. A polearm's staff was generally made from local hardwoods, such as ashwood, hickory, walnut or other local woods. Staffs often included an iron cap at the bottom end, called a butt cone, to keep the wood from splitting and also to help thrust the pole into the ground for different uses.

Toggle: Often called a crossbar, a toggle